

Testimony from:
Ben Williams, Senior Policy Counsel, FairVote Action

In SUPPORT of SB 298
February 6, 2026
Senate Government Operations Committee

Dear Chair Collamore and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express FairVote Action's support for SB 298, the Vermont Voting Rights Act (VTVRA). FairVote Action is a national nonpartisan organization that researches and advocates for reforms that improve our elections.

This landmark legislation would address discrimination against voters of color in Vermont and position Vermont as a national leader on protecting the right to vote.

With a U.S. Supreme Court that seems intent on eliminating many federal voting rights protections, the passage of state-level Voting Rights Acts is the most effective tool to protect and promote the franchise of all Americans. Since California passed the first state Voting Rights Act in 2001, New York, Connecticut, Washington, Virginia, Oregon, Colorado, and Minnesota have passed their own state VRA legislation too.

In every state, discriminatory barriers to equal participation still exist for voters of color and voters whose first language is not English, particularly at the local level. The Vermont VRA would go above and beyond the protections provided by federal law and ensure that all voters have an equal opportunity to participate in the political process.

The Vermont VRA builds on the most impactful provisions of other states' Voting Rights Acts, and creates some of the strongest voting rights protections in the country:

- The language assistance provisions in the bill will remedy inequalities in voter registration rates for protected language communities.
- The vote dilution provisions in the bill will make it harder for local governments to change voting procedures in ways that harm voter access.
- The bill would prohibit bad actors from intimidating or harassing voters or election officials.
- The bill would give voters new rights to bring claims of discrimination to state courts, and ensure the judiciary is committed to protecting the fundamental right to vote for every Vermonter.

The Vermont VRA also allows localities and courts to use share-based methods of election, such as proportional voting systems, to remedy violations of the voting rights protections provided in the bill. There is no one-size-fits all approach to ensure that every voter's voice is heard, so it is important to give courts appropriate flexibility to tailor remedies to local conditions and the nature of the violation. This provides more options and more agency for impacted communities to decide what solution works best for them. It also gives judges more tools to protect minority voting rights even if the Supreme Court rules race-conscious redistricting unconstitutional.

FairVote Action is available to answer any other questions from the committee or provide additional data. You can reach me at bwilliams@fairvoteaction.org and my FairVote Action colleagues at info@fairvoteaction.org.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Ben Williams

Senior Policy Counsel and Researcher at FairVote Action